

NWA Specialized Operations Committee

Decision Support Services Success Stories

Support to the State of South Carolina for Hurricane Matthew

This is the first of many highlights our committee plans to share throughout the year to showcase the great decision support services that are provided by the weather, water, and climate enterprise. Our committee hopes that this not only shares the great work done for Hurricane Matthew, but also inspires others to go the extra mile to provide needed support for high impact events.

Hurricane Matthew's impacts will be long-lasting along the Florida to Virginia coasts. Thanks to the amazing support provided by our National Weather Service offices to their state, location, regional, and national emergency management, many pro-active decisions were made to help keep the public and property safe. Just one example of hundreds is the support provided by WFO Columbia, SC during Hurricane Matthew.

South Carolina State Emergency Management, the local Weather Forecast Offices which serve the state, and the National Hurricane Center became acutely aware of the potential dangers posed by Hurricane Matthew more than one week prior to landfall. The state started the first of numerous e-mails and conference calls on September 30.

WFO Columbia deployed a team of four meteorologists to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) from October 3 through October 12. This team was led by Warning Coordination Meteorologist John Quagliariello, and included Meteorologist-in-Charge Rich Okulski, Incident Meteorologist Mike Proud and Senior Service Hydrologist Leonard Vaughan. The deployed meteorologists worked closely with the local offices which serve the state, the National Hurricane Center, the Eastern Region Operations Center, and FEMA Region IV on the forecasted impacts of storm surge, wind, and inland flooding. This collaboration also involved developing consistent messaging so decision makers and residents could take the proper precautions.

Hurricane Matthew proved to be a difficult tropical cyclone to accurately forecast due to its track which was nearly parallel to hundreds of miles of Southeast U.S. coastline. The deployed meteorologists worked closely with the SEOC staff and the Governor's Office on the probabilities of four different scenarios (direct hit, brief landfall, close pass by, and miss), which aided in evacuation decisions. John briefed Governor Nikki Haley and her senior leadership twice daily. He also stood by her side during numerous news conferences, briefing the latest on



“Matthew” after the Governor’s opening remarks.

John provided Governor Haley with the key piece of “actionable weather intelligence” which resulted in the first full scale evacuation of the South Carolina coastline since Hurricane Floyd in 1999. He provided her with a range of potential storm surge inundation values based on various track scenarios twenty four hours prior to the time window to execute an evacuation. The rapport developed with Governor Haley led John to being recalled to the SEOC on October 10 at the request of the Governor’s office to support response operations.

State Emergency Management Director Kim Stenson presented John with one of the first agency coins on November 3 to recognize his selfless and extraordinary service to South Carolina during the most significant hurricane since Hugo in 1989. State Emergency Management leaders and the Governor called him their “rock star” during the event.

So many great relationships with partners were forged for the future from the support during Hurricane Matthew. Due to the selfless efforts of meteorologists and hydrologists during this event, the emergency management community will undoubtedly continue to rely heavily on them for high impacts events to come in the future.

If you are interested in sharing a success story that you had with decision support services please share it with the NWA Specialized Operations Committee by emailing: Charles.Woodrum@noaa.gov and Michael.Eckert@noaa.gov.